

**Howard County Commission for Veterans and Military Families  
Government Office Building  
9830 Patuxent Woods Dr., Columbia, MD 21046**

**Minutes**

**Thursday, 05 September 2019**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Members Present: Mr. Jonathan K. Branch, Ms. Jennifer Anthony, Mr. Michael Blum, Mr. Steven M. Bolen, Mr. Robert Gillette, and Mr. Robert Lowell.

Members Excused Absence: Mr. Greg Jolissaint, Mr. Reginald Avery, and Mr. Bob Moore.

Howard County Government: Ms. Lisa Terry (Manager, Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families) and Ms. Alisson Jessing (Manager, Events & Seminars, Howard County Library System)

Guests: Mr. Ed Hall (Howard County Joint Military Council), Mr. Lou Schott (Howard County Joint Military Council), Mr. Bob Chew (JMMC, American Legion Post 156), Mr. Bob Pelletier (American Legion Post 156, VFW), Mr. Vance Blakely (American Legion Post 156), Mr. Bob Berlett (American Legion Post 300), Mr. John Way (The VA Way), Ms. Edna Cummings ("Six Triple Eight"), Mr. Joshua Gillette, Mr. Joseph Griffin, Ms. Nafrettih Griffin, Ms. Stacey Shade-Ware, Mr. Keith Hawk, Mr. Paul Rivers, Mr. Chris Yates, Mr. Daniel Hill, Mr. Samuel Nokuri, Mr. Yale Stenzler, and Mr. Keith McGuire.

**MEETING:**

1900 hrs Mr. Jonathan K. Branch, Co-Chair, Howard County Commission for Veterans and Military Families, presiding, opened the meeting.

- 1) The Role was called: Six Commission members being in attendance, Mr. Branch declared the Commission was in quorum and brought the meeting to order.
- 2) Mr. Branch acknowledge the attendance of key Commission personnel: Ms. Lisa Terry, Manager, Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families.
- 3) Mr. Branch acknowledged the attendance of new Commission members and special guests: Ms. Jennifer Anthony, new Commission member - CONGRATULATIONS, COL(R) Edna Cummings, representing the "Six Triple Eight," and Mr. Joshua Gillette.

4) Special Presentations:

- a. Mr. Joshua Gillette was recognized for his community service and was presented with a certificate of appreciation for collecting care packages for deployed service personnel. He raised over \$500 in cash and in-kind donations for Bailey's Bundles. (WELL DONE, Joshua!)
- b. COL(R) Cummings gave a short history of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion of WWII, and briefed the Commission on her efforts in obtaining a U.S. Congressional Gold Medal citation for the unit. The "Six Triple Eight" was an all-female, all African-American unit that served in the European theater clearing approximately two years of backlogged mail for nearly seven million troops, U.S. government personnel, and Red Cross workers. She asked the Commission to support her efforts to gain the Congressional Gold Medal citation for the unit by asking residents to contact their U.S. Senators and Representatives to support and vote "yes" on Senate Bill 633 and House Bill 3138.

5) Approval of the 05 JUN 2019 Minutes

- a. Mr. Branch entered the 05 JUN 2019 Commission minutes onto the table and opened the table for discussion. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion and second to the motion were made. Mr. Branch called for a vote and the minutes were approved by voice vote. Subsequently, Mr. Branch directed that the 05 JUN 2019 Commission minutes be entered into the official record and it was so done.

6) Old Business

- a. Mr. Way updated the Commission on The VA Way's Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) courses. The VA Way offered two courses on 19 and 20 June to veterans. Howard County Council Members Ms. Jung (D4) and Mr. Yungmann (D5) attended part of the 20 June course. Mr. Way also met with Council Members Mr. Jones (D2), Ms. Rigby (D3), representatives from Ms. Walsh's (D1) office, and with Mr. DeLorenzo, Howard County Director of Policy and Programs. All expressed support to helping County residents struggling with mental health issues and in The VA Way's efforts to bring mental first aid classes to the County. The VA Way will be holding a five-day MHFA Youth Instructor Training course on 23 - 27 September.
- b. Mr. Hall reported on the success of the annual Village of River Hill 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade. He reported that this was the largest parade so far held by the community.

- c. Mr. Hall reported on the annual Howard County Fair held on 3 - 10 August. Armed Forces Day was 3 August and several local Veterans Service Organizations (VSO's) staffed a table and provided outreach, resources and literature to veterans and their families.
- d. Ms. Terry gave an update on the Howard County Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiative. The program has a goal of making 1% of the County's total dollar value of procurement contracts be let directly or indirectly to Veteran-Owned Business Enterprises. For more information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/veterans](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/veterans).
- e. Mr. Blum and Mr. Chew gave an update on the Howard County Veteran Friendly Business Program. To this date, there are 38 businesses with over 400 veterans and their family members enrolled in the program. Businesses that provide 24/7 discounts to Veterans can be recognized as a Veteran-friendly business and listed in the Veteran Friendly Business magazine and website. More info at [www.VFBMD.com](http://www.VFBMD.com).
- f. Mr. Blum and Ms. Terry gave an update on the Howard County Veteran Parking Initiative. The Initiative provides for special parking spots for Veterans near store fronts. To this date, there are eight locations with erected designated parking signs. The cost is about \$100 per sign installation.
- g. Mr. Bob Gillette gave an update on the Veterans Monument and Neighborhood Square ground-breaking ceremony. The Howard County Veterans Foundation in cooperation with the Howard County Government, Howard Hughes Corporation, and the Columbia Association held a ground-breaking ceremony on 29 June.
- h. Ms. Jessing briefed the Commission on the Howard County Library System's initiatives to reach out to Veterans and their families. The Library System will be hosting a Veteran's Writing Project. The Project will foster writing and narrative skills that Veterans and active duty personnel need to share their stories. Workshops will run on Tuesdays starting 3 September through 10 October from 1830 to 2030 hours at the Miller Branch Library.

## 7) New Business

- a. Recommendations were discussed on how the Commission could support COL(R) Cummings' efforts to obtain a U.S. Congressional Gold Medal citation for the 6888<sup>th</sup>. A motion was made and seconded to write a letter in support of her efforts. Mr. Branch called for a vote and the motion was passed by voice vote. Mr. Bob Gillette and Mr. Bolen will work on the letter and coordinate with Ms. Terry on obtaining Howard County Government approval.

- b. Mr. Bob Gillette briefed the Commission on the next steps that the Howard County Veterans Foundation is taking to complete the Veterans Monument and Neighborhood Square project. He explained that Phase I will create a park for a veteran's monument, children's playground, and a community gathering/free speech zone. The Foundation is currently working to collect private donations to design and construct the monument. More info and to donate at this link [www.howardcountyveterans.org](http://www.howardcountyveterans.org).
- c. Mr. Bolen briefed the Commission on the 17 July Veterans Administration Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) VSO and Congressional Stakeholders (CS) Meeting in Baltimore. For more information, please refer to Attachment A of these minutes.
- d. The Commission discussed recommendations for continued Commission representation at future VAMHCS VSO and CS meetings. Mr. Bolen volunteered to continue to represent the Commission at the meetings. Mr. Branch asked if there were any objections to Mr. Bolen's continued representation. Hearing none, Mr. Branch directed Mr. Bolen to continue to represent the Commission at the VAMHCS meetings. Meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month starting at 1100 hours at the Baltimore Medical Center on 10 North Greene Street, Room 3A-300.
- e. Mr. Lowell and Ms. Terry briefed the Commission on the Veterans Day Howard County Public Schools Presentation Program 2019. The Program is designed to teach students about the importance of special days of remembrance such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day, and what service to our country means. If anyone knows of a school that would like to hold a veteran remembrance day event, please contact the Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families at (410) 313-0821.
- f. Mr. Bob Gillette, Ms. Terry, and Mr. Hall briefed the Commission on the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Howard County Veterans Day Parade hosted by the Howard County Veterans Foundation. The parade will be held on 10 November and will step off at 0930 hours from Merriweather Post Pavilion. The parade will feature military units, first responders, marching bands, and other patriotic units. If any patriotic group would like to march in the parade, please contact the Foundation. The Foundation is also looking for sponsors to support the Parade.
- g. Ms. Terry and Mr. Hall discussed recommendations for the Veterans Day Parade Grand Marshall. The theme for this year's Parade will be "The Citizen Soldier" to honor those who have served and who have returned home to give back to their community through volunteer work or other service. Please submit any recommendations to the Howard County Veterans Foundation.

h. Ms. Terry briefed the Commission on the next Veterans Resource Fair planning activities. The Fair will take place at the Howard County Community College (HCCC) newly renovated Galleria on 21 April from 1600 to 1900 hours.

i. Mr. Hall briefed the Commission on the Howard County Joint Military Council (JMC) items of importance to the Commission:

1) The joint calendar will be up and running in October. This will give JMC members a single place to coordinate upcoming activities in one location.

2) Mission BBQ at Columbia Crossing will be honoring Veterans starting at 1130 hours on September 11 with local VSO's - the national anthem will be sounded at noon.

3) On 21 September, Marine Corps League, SSgt Karl G. Taylor, Sr. Detachment 1084, will conduct a flag raising ceremony at the Harriet Tubman Day Celebration at the Harriet Tubman Jr./Sr. High School, 8405 Harriet Tubman Ln, Columbia, MD.

4) There will be two military shoots this Fall: 19 October Trap Shoot and 3 November Colonel Lou Schott 200 yard off-hand.

5) The next U.S. Flag Retirement Ceremony will take place on 12 October at 1200 hours at the Yingling-Ridgely VFW & Auxiliary Post 7472 (4225 VFW Ln, Ellicott City, MD).

6) Finally, Mr. Hall reported that USMC COL(R) Lou Schott met with a fellow U.S. Marine during an Honor Flight activity on this date. Both served during the Battle of Peleliu in World War II. COL(R) Schott was on hand and told the Commission about his moving experience meeting with the Marine at the airport today.

U.S. Marines of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and soldiers of the U.S. Army's 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division engaged Japanese forces on the island of Peleliu in November 1944. In total, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division suffered over 6,500 casualties during their first month on the island. The 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division also suffered heavy losses with 3,300 casualties.

j. Ms. Terry briefed the Commission on the status of applications to the Commission. The Commission is allowed 13 members by statute. Ms. Terry reported that the Commission has three vacancies and ten applicants.

k. Mr. Branch asked if there were any further announcements that anyone would like to make. Ms. Terry announced that:

1) The Horizon Foundation was holding a Mental Health Film Festival on 23 October that will also feature Veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

2) Project Opportunity will be hosting a ten-week course for Veterans who want to start their own business.

3) The American Foundation for the Prevention of Suicide (AFPS) will be holding their "Out of the Darkness Walk" on 28 September at Lake Elkhorn starting at 1000 hours (registration)/1130 hours walk begins.

4) The Resilience Run/Walk/Ruck 5K will be on 14 September.

5) Howard County Patriot Day will be held on 11 September with a 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony at 1038 hours at the George Howard Building in Ellicott City, MD.

6) The Howard County Community College Veterans Breakfast and Recognition Event will be held 7 November at the Galleria with breakfast starting at 0900 hours and the ceremony starting at 1030 hours.

8) Next Commission Meeting Date(s)

a) Mr. Branch announced that the next meeting of the Howard County Commission for Veterans and Military Families will be held on Thursday, 3 October starting at 1900 hours at the Government Office Building, 9830 Patuxent Woods Dr., Columbia, MD 21046.

b) After October, the Commission will meet again on 3 November.

ADJOURNMENT:

2030 hrs Mr. Branch, called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion and second to the motion were made. Subsequent to the motions for adjournment, Mr. Branch closed the meeting and directed the Commission to stand in adjournment until 3 October 2019.

Minutes were taken by: Mr. Steven M. Bolen

Attachments:

A) Meeting Notes: 17 July 2019 VAMHCS VSO & CS Stakeholders Meeting

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **Veterans Service Organization & Congressional Stakeholder Meeting**

VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS)  
Baltimore VA Medical Center  
Multipurpose Room, 3A-300  
10 North Greene Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

17 July 2019

**1100 hrs      Dr. Adam M. Robison, Director VAMHCS, presiding, brought the meeting to order.**

- 1) H.R. 299 - 116<sup>th</sup> Congress: Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 was signed into law on 25 June 2019.

The Act amends Title 38, U.S. Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes.

Excerpt from the Act regarding "Exposure:"

"A veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, shall be presumed to have been exposed during such service to an herbicide agent unless there is affirmative evidence to establish that the veteran was not exposed to any such agent during that service."

Benefits will expand to include children born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure in Thailand. Coverage for this condition already exists for the children of Vietnam and Korean DMZ veterans.

Text of the Act: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr299/text>

- 2) The VA now offers Urgent Care Benefits that provides Veterans with greater choice and access to timely, high-quality care. Urgent care providers will treat injuries and illnesses that require immediate attention but are not life-threatening. This new benefit supplements the health care services currently being offered by the VA Maryland Health Care System.

For more information, please visit:

[https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent\\_Care.asp](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent_Care.asp)

- 3) Veterans with criminal records may still be eligible for burial benefits. To be eligible, they should have a qualifying discharge and not be convicted of a capital crime or Tier 3 sex offense - or, have evaded conviction of the same due to flight or death. Benefits include burial in a national cemetery, headstone, and flag.
- 4) Dr. Olga Whitman, O.D., gave a short overview of the Advanced Low Vision Clinic. She stated that about 70% of what we learn is from our vision and that many of the Vets she sees feel that they're getting "dumber" as time goes on. As an example, she talked about how fast technology is advancing and that there are many people with vision impairments that don't know what an iPad looks like. As the rate of new products are developed and introduced into the world, it becomes harder for people with limited vision to keep up with what's going on. At the Clinic, they're working with advanced technologies like virtual reality devices to help augment vision. Other devices, like Amazon's Alexa, that operate off of voice commands, also help people with limited vision to navigate the world better.
- 5) Mr. Stephen Sigelman discussed some of the VA's work in tele-mental health and tele-primary care for Vets that live in rural areas, or who may find it difficult to obtain regular transportation to a clinic for help. These "tele" services will help with continuity of care, compliance of care, and convenience of care. They will also improve VA productivity by reducing "no-show" or "late-show" appointments. Mr. Sigelman gave a live demonstration of "video-on-demand" care with one of his associates at an offsite location.

Dr. Robinson remarked that the work being performed by Dr. Whitman and Mr. Sigelman are important to help Vets better navigate and transport themselves through the world.

Next meeting: 21 August, 1100 hrs, VAMHCS, Baltimore VA Medical Center, Rm. 3A-300.

**1215 hrs      Dr. Adam M. Robison adjourned the meeting.**

Notes taken by: Steven M. Bolen